

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2414

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to local control of student assessments in grades three, five, six, and eight to meet federal requirements for Washington's academic assessment system.

Brief Description: Regarding Washington's academic assessment system.

Sponsors: Representatives Haler, Talcott and McCune.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/19/06, 2/2/06 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to request flexibility under the federal No Child Left Behind Act to conduct a pilot project with six school districts using an assessment other than the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in grades three, five, six, and eight.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Priest, Santos, Shabro, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, in order to receive federal funds under Title I, each state must annually submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) that details the state's system of academic standards, assessments, and accountability. By the 2005-06 school year, the state's assessment system must include yearly assessments of students in each of grades three through eight in reading and mathematics, plus at least one assessment of these subjects for high school students. By 2007-08, assessments in science must be administered in at least one elementary, middle, and high school grade.

Under state law, Washington's assessment system already includes the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics at grades four,

seven, and 10, as well as a science assessment in grades five, eight, and 10. Therefore, the additional testing requirement to comply with NCLB will be reading and mathematics assessments administered in grades three, five, six, and eight.

Under DOE rules, a state's system can be based on a uniform set of statewide assessments or a combination of state and local assessments. However, if local assessments are included, the state must assure they meet the same characteristics as a state assessment and the results can be aggregated and compared across the state. The state must also demonstrate that its overall system has a rational and coherent design.

Under Washington's NCLB plan, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) has proposed and is implementing a uniform set of statewide assessments, using the WASL in reading and mathematics at each grade level required to be assessed under the NCLB.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Before the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, the SPI must request flexibility under the NCLB to conduct a pilot project with no more than six school districts using an assessment other than the WASL in grades three, five, six, and eight in mathematics and reading. The SPI works with local school directors, administrators, teachers, and parents in developing the request and selecting the assessment. The districts in the pilot project are of varying sizes and geographic locations, including urban, suburban, and rural areas. They also enroll ethnically and economically diverse student populations.

If the request for flexibility is granted, the SPI revises the state accountability plan to incorporate the pilot project. School districts in the pilot project are not required to administer the WASL in reading and mathematics in grades three, five, six, and eight during the pilot. The SPI evaluates whether the piloted assessment can be used on a statewide basis and forwards findings and recommendations to the Legislature and the U.S. DOE.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill required the SPI to revise the state plan under the NCLB so that assessments in grades three, five, six, and eight did not rely on open-ended questions and to permit inclusion of locally selected assessments at those grade levels. The State Board of Education would approve at least three options for districts to choose. After the Legislature approved the revised plan, the SPI would submit it to federal authorities. The substitute bill directs the SPI to request flexibility under the NCLB to conduct a pilot project with six school districts using an assessment other than the WASL for purposes of complying with the NCLB. If the request for flexibility is granted, school districts in the pilot project will not be required to administer the WASL in reading and mathematics in grades three, five, six, and eight.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support of original bill) There has been much discussion across the state about why we need to administer the full-blown WASL test in third, fifth, sixth and eighth grade. We are very much in favor of high standards, and having the WASL in grades four, seven, and 10 is essential. But the federal law does not require this type of assessment. There are other assessments that are cheaper, quicker, easier, and provide better results for parents and teachers. The WASL is expensive to administer, and it hurts students because so much time is spent testing rather than instructing. The federal law allows flexibility and we need to take advantage of that. This is a step in the right direction.

(With concerns on original bill) It seems to be a reasonable proposal to permit school districts more flexibility in choosing a test. Other states have more than one test. It should be a goal to reduce assessment time and increase the quality of instructional time.

Testimony Against: (Original bill) The test used by the Richland School District is a wonderful tool, and they have done impressive work in predicting students' WASL performance using this diagnostic test. However, there are very strict requirements under the federal law for a state's overall assessment system. None of the other states are getting approval for multiple choice tests. It is a huge process to deal with the DOE.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Representative Haler, prime sponsor; Richard Jansons, Richland School Board; Richard Semler, Richland School District; Dan Steele, Washington State School Directors Association; Nancy Vernon; Rachel DeBellis, Parent Empowerment Network; and Alton McDonald, National Action Network.

(With concerns on original bill) Gary King, Washington Education Association.

(Opposed to original bill) Terry Bergeson, Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Joe Wilhoff, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.